DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 147 798 CS 003 851

TITLE	An Administrator's Guide to Literacy Education.
INSTITUTION	Illinois State Office of Education, Springfield.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C. Right to Read Program.
PUB DATE	77
NOTE	30p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Criteria; *Evaluation Methods; *Literacy; *Literacy Education; *Program Administration; Program Development; *Program Evaluation; *Reading Instruction; Reading Programs; School Community Relationship; Volunteers
IDENTIFIERS	Right to Read

ABSTRACT

Evaluation may provide a mechanism by which educators involved in a literacy program may become self-aware, self-monitoring, and self-critical. The major section of this publication examines eight questions related to evaluation: (1) Why evaluate? (2) Who is the evaluation for? (3) What questions should the evaluation address? (4) What resources are available for the evaluation? (5) What evidence should be collected? (6) How is the evidence to be collected? (7) How is the evidence to be analyzed? (8) How can the evaluation findings be reported? Other sections discuss ways of describing the literacy program; setting boundaries for evaluation; considering literacy education from the standpoint of the local program, the school-based program, the Right to Read volunteer program, and program support; and dealing with administrative concerns related to program development, community attitudes, and school/community cooperation. (GW)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED147798

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

An Administrator's Guide to Literacy Education

Right to Read

State Board of Education
Illinois Office of Education
Joseph M. Cronin
State Superintendent of Education

CS003 551

AN ADMINISTRATOR'S GUIDE TO LITERACY EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Current evaluation theory and research suggest that in the evaluation of educational programs, the complex interdependence of educational circumstance, action and consequence, must be taken into account. Older models of evaluation focus exclusively on measuring the discrepancy between aims and achievement; newer models recognize the need to account for the complexity of the whole program. In the newer evaluation models, the evaluator will often refrain from making judgments or recommendations for the decision-maker, preferring instead to provide the decision-maker with an adequate description of the program. In this case, it is hoped that those publically accountable for the decision will make the judgment themselves, based on the best information available. This information may include the judgments of those participating in the program who are qualified to evaluate it by virtue of their *involvement*. The program description may also include the judgments of outsiders with special knowledge or expertise in the field of reading who are qualified to evaluate the program by virtue of their *independence* from the program.

In the "new" style of evaluation, the evaluator may define evaluation as "the process of conceiving, obtaining and communicating information for the guidance of educational decision making with regard to a specified program." This definition may seem eccentric to some, since it appears to be at odds with more conventional definitions of evaluation, such as "judging the worth of something." But this so-called eccentricity is deliberate: the logic of public accountability requires that decision-makers responsible for the expenditure of public funds should not be pre-empted by the evaluator. The evaluator should provide information (including the judgments of those qualified to judge) for the *guidance* of the decision-maker, but should not usurp the legitimate authority of the decision-maker. In fact, in the newer approaches to evaluation, the evaluator will be almost anything *but* an evaluator: he or she will guide decision making but will refrain from making decisions on behalf of the decision-maker; will present the judgments of those qualified to give them, yet avoid making any prescriptive judgments; will present alternative courses of action, yet not recommend the course to follow.

If the evaluator pre-empts the rights and responsibilities of the decision-maker, the evaluation will lose the disinterest which underwrites its independence and "objectivity." The decision-maker depends upon the independence of the evaluation for its credibility. A biased evaluation cannot legitimate a decision; it can only provide a rationalization. An evaluation must be open, sensitive and disinterested (and sometimes offensive) if it is to provide genuine guidance for the decision-maker.

An evaluation cannot possibly provide answers to all the questions that might be asked about an educational program. It must be selective, and must deal with those issues that people interested int he program regard as significant. Evaluation shares some characteristics with social science research; but differs from

"pure" research in that it is oriented to *action*, not to knowledge for its own sake. Evaluation must be sensitive to the needs and concerns of the decision-maker, not the needs of distant research communities. It must address the program at hand rather than attempt to deal with all the questions that might be of interest to educational researchers. Evaluation is a *practical* activity, feeding practical concerns in an action-context; it is not a theoretical activity addressed to theoretical and methodological issues of interest to researchers alone.

Evaluation is thus a political activity. It has the power to legitimate the actions of decision-makers or to deny them legitimation. It has the power to favor some points of view at the expense of other points of view. To come to terms with this political power, the evaluator must make the evaluation independent of particular influences and open to the concerns of a range of interest groups. To be of real service to the decision-makers, an evaluation must, as far as possible, tell the story of the program "as it is," not offer the evaluator's own viewpoint dressed up in the jargon of the expert. One evaluator recently remarked that "if the evaluator starts hawking his own conscience around the evaluation, imposing his own views on those the evaluation is intended to serve, at that point he ceases to be an evaluator." Evaluation is an information service to decision-makers, not a therapeutic exercise for those wanting to express their own biases. In the "new" evaluation, the evaluator must address the issues confronting those concerned with the program and collect the judgments of those qualified to judge it; these issues, along with relevant information (evidence) and judgments, are presented to the decision-maker who must then decide on appropriate courses of action.

To assist administrators in planning evaluation activities and judging the adequacy of proposed evaluation designs, this paper will adopt a view of evaluation organized around eight major questions:

1. Why evaluate? (The *purpose* of the evaluation.)
2. Who is the evaluation for? (The *audiences* of the evaluation.)
3. What questions should the evaluation address? (The *issues* which focus the evaluation effort.)
4. What *resources* are available for the evaluation?
5. What *evidence* should be collected?
6. How is the evidence to be collected? (*Data gathering*.)
7. How is the evidence to be *analyzed?*
8. How can the evaluation findings be *reported?*[1]

But before addressing these questions in detail, we will look at various ways in which the *literacy program itself* may be conceptualized. This will suggest the kinds of audiences and issues relevant in the context of the reading program and its broader background in literacy education.

I. THE LITERACY PROGRAM

In this discussion of literacy programs, we will be primarily concerned with:

1. The reading program.

2. Contexts in which the school's own program is being augmented by special Right to Read (RTR) efforts, in this case, a volunteer program.

3. Evaluation problems which require the specialist understanding of those with action roles within literacy program--but not those kinds of evaluation problems requiring specific technical skill in areas like test developmental use and statistical analysis.

One way to describe the literacy program is to consider it in terms of administrative levels or structures. In terms of legal requirements of and fiscal arrangements for literary education, we can readily distinguish the following levels:

classroom (and home)

school (and community)

district

state

regional

federal

At each level, persons with responsibility are aware of the concerns appropriate to that level; however, if evaluation at each level is to be useful, the links of practice and policy *between* levels must be considered. The district administrator must be familiar with state, regional and federal concerns; the state administrator with concerns of teachers; the classroom teacher aware of the national policies of the RTR effort, and so forth. Evaluation efforts may help in developing increased awareness about problems of practice within levels, to be sure; but in addition, they may help in increasing sensitivity across levels.

Functional Levels

Another way to describe the literacy program is to consider it in terms of functional units. The following functions (among others) are readily identified:

program planning, policy-making and provision

program practice

program management regulation and maintenance

support services

These functions are also interrelated: each has implications for the others. Provision creates opportunities and imposes constraints on practice; practice suggests modifications for policy; support services available in the community suggest modifications of provision to capitalize on interest, and so forth.

But the evaluator who becomes involved in a program cannot break it down so easily into structural or functional units. He or she enters a world of people, things, events, concerns, hopes, plans, failures and successes, not a program machine. The evaluator must address Johnny's failure to reach third-grade reading levels and the parents' anxieties; the teacher's worry about the consequences of Johnny's promotion; the community volunteer's concerns about liaison with the teacher; the principal's excitement about the possibility of improving school-community relations through the volunteer program; the superintendent's hopes that the reading program will give the school board a different perspective on community involvement; the taxpayer's concerns about increases in education spending and evidence of improvement; the State RTR director's worries about the problems of implementing national policy in a small rural district, and the like. These are the kinds of issues an evaluation can hope to illuminate. Various kinds of evidence are needed to throw light on such questions; these questions cannot be resolved by pointing to student reading scores but require a thorough understanding of the way the program works, the variety of aspirations it attempts to serve and the kinds of "happenings" in which it is involved. The point of the evaluation is to generate insights into the system which suggest where, and perhaps how, the system might be improved.

The literacy program projects into at least the four levels (classroom, local, state and federal) and involves a diversity of participants at each level: USOE, federal regions and federal RTR staff; school district central office staff; boards of education, community members and local RTR staff; school principals, teachers, parents, students and RTR volunteers. All are potential participants in and audiences of literacy program evaluations, and their questions must be addressed in the evaluation.

Setting Boundaries

Deciding on the boundaries of an evaluation is always an act of imagination. Though the evaluator begins from a particular set of issues, the evaluation must reach out into the program itself to gain further perspectives on the questions, then refine the original issues so that the "primary" audience can see them, and the information generated from a wider perspective. The three phases of the boundary setting process may be represented as:

1. *Gathering the original issues:* contacting the primary audience, becoming familiar with their concerns and questions, and stating the issues as points of departure for the evaluation effort;

2. *Expanding the scope of the evaluation,* contacting "secondary" audiences (others who will be interested in the evaluation findings) and relevant others (program participants) to make sure that a range of perspectives on the original issues will be included; and

3. *"Progressive focusing,"* developing a final set of issues to be addressed in the evaluation which refines the original issues

in the light of evidence collected and information gathered and which establishes a "language of negotiation" between the different audiences of the evaluation and participants in the program.

These three phases will overlap, and the final stage will involve redefining the original issues in the light of data generated during the evaluation. Unlike social science research, in which hypotheses are stated in advance and data collected afterwards, evaluation is *exploratory*, and involves redefining the questions as new information comes to light. As the original issues are explored and redefined they are, in a sense, exhausted-but new issues will have been identified and the process can begin again. Evaluation is thus best seen not as providing once-and-for-all answers, but as providing *tentative conclusions*; not as an episodic activity with neat questions and neat answers, but as a *continuous process*; not as a linear sequence of problem definition, investigation, analysis and conclusion, but as an *iterative process* of opening issues, redefinition and exploration, feedback of tentative findings and further redefinition in a self-critical evolution of understanding.

II. FOUR PERSPECTIVES

Perspective 1: Local Program Policy, Provision and Practice

Even at the local level, there are many people involved in the literacy program who have a legitimate place in the evaluation. The decision of whose perspectives are to be tapped must be made: the evaluator must start from the concerns of a primary audience then select or sample among other possible secondary audiences and participants to determine whose concerns will be addressed. From the local program perspective, the following six groups (each suggesting further sub-groups) may be identified:

central office staff

the school administration

the local RTR program staff

teachers

students

local RTR volunteers

Program functions of concern to these individuals and groups will include:

liaison between

central office and the local RTR program
central office and the school
the school and the local RTR program
school administration and teachers
the RTR volunteer and the teacher

program planning and provision at

- the local level
- the school level
- the classroom level

program development (and in-service training) for

- the school-based program
- the local RTR effort

program articulation in terms of plans for

- instructional programs and the management of instruction
- cooperative regulation and maintenance of the program
- special program needs, including the development of diagnostic programs, special tutoring and the like
- access to and utilization of materials

The individuals and institutions involved and the kinds of functions through which they interact at this level suggest an enormous range of issues. Since we cannot hope to enumerate them all, it may be useful to list a range of insights from the research on teaching reading which the local administrator might take into account in deciding program policy, provision and planning. These insights may serve to raise questions about the adequacy of the program.

Teachers, not methods, seem to produce the main difference in reading achievement.

Although failure to reach comprehension skills has contributed to falling scores on standardized reading tests, factors outside the school also have been heavily contributory.

Scores on primary-grade reading tests, emphasizing word recognition, appear to have risen; scores on middle-grade tests, emphasizing comprehension, in contrast, seem to have fallen; the resulting conclusion is that word recognition skill does not guarantee parallel comprehension skill.

As comparatively greater emphasis is placed upon the teaching of reading, it is important to maintain a proper balance between the teaching of comprehension and the teaching of decoding skills.

The use of behavioral objectives in teaching reading comprehension can be problematic; therefore, the assessment of learner outcomes, on the basis of such objective, should be approached cautiously.

Parental involvement is a significant factor in improving reading skills in the primary grades.

Premature emphasis on reading skills (during the preschool years) appears to offer little real advantage.

Prevailing theories on the teaching of reading conflict; it cannot be assumed, therefore, that any one method is superior to all others.

No known teaching method produces superior results with every child.

Used properly by skilled teachers, basal readers seem to yeild consistently satisfactory results.

Perspective 2: The School-based Program

In considering literacy education from the perspective of the school's own program, a different pattern of individuals, functions and issues will emerge. Here, the key actors will be:

central office staff

school administration

teachers

students

the student's family and the community

But the functions of concern to these individuals and groups will be somewhat different from those in Perspective 1. They include:

policy formulation and implementation

resource provision (including provision of inservice courses, technical assistance, provision of special services, etc.)

diagnosis and teaching

instruction and instructional management

liaison with home and family

school-community cooperation

From the perspective of the school-based program, issues such as the following might be considered:

What is the involvement of teachers in policy formulation?

How effective is the school's diagnostic program?

How are curriculum materials being adapted by teachers? What are the needs within the school the curriculum materials do not meet? Where must further materials be provided or developed?

Is the school's performance in teaching reading skills declining or improving? What tests are being used and what are their strengths and limitations?

What support can the school's reading program count on from parents? Is there some way parents can help? What special home needs of students can the school attempt to respond to?

Will the changeover to a new reading program be worth the effort in terms of teacher satisfaction? Will the "injection" of an innovation revitalize the school's commitment to literacy education? Will special in-service programs be necessary?

Are minority groups adequately served by the program? Are the readers currently in use in the school unsatisfactory in terms of sex-role stereotyping or racial bias?

What are the patterns of use of the school library (by grade level)? How might further use of the library be encouraged? What are the implications for acquisitions?

Are teachers familiar with alternative methods of teaching reading? Do they prefer a "singular" approach or an eclectic one? What reasons do they give for their choices?

To what extent does the school's literacy program reach into the subject areas of math, social science and the like? Can it be extended further?

Do higher-grade-level teachers blame lower-grade-level teaching failures for reading problems among their students? Can inter-grade liaison be improved or ungraded reading programs be created?

What teachers in the school have special interests or competencies in the area of reading? Are they being used effectively by the school?

How can the central office staff be more responsive to teachers' needs in this area?

Perspective 3: The RTR Volunteer Program

The RTR volunteer program provides another perspective on the evaluation of literacy education, and may present special difficulties because it *is* a volunteer organization. In particular, the sensitivity of relationships between volunteers and administrators, teachers, students and parents must be considered if these delicate links are to be preserved and enhanced. The local RTR volunteer program will involve:

the local RTR program staff

central office personnel

school administration

volunteers

teachers

students

Two main functions of liaison and tutoring forge the links between the volunteer program and the school, but a range of sub-functions may be identified:

RTR local program - central office liaison

RTR local program - school liaison

volunteer placement

teacher requests for volunteers

teacher-volunteer cooperation

tutoring

RTR program-volunteer liaison (including initial training, follow-up, replacement, etc.)

Issues of concern to evaluators from the perspective of the volunteer program might include:

How effective is RTR volunteer program recruitment?

How satisfied are volunteers with their roles? What happens to people who withdraw from the program?

How satisfactory is teacher-volunteer cooperation? What problems emerge? Do teachers feel that their role is being usurped by the volunteer?

Which schools seek volunteers? Which do not, and why? Do these schools know (enough) about the program?

Have volunteers been unsatisfactory? Have teachers demanded too little or too much of volunteers?

How many students can volunteers cope with in individual tutoring? What categories of volunteers can be identified?

What rights and responsibilities does the school give the volunteer? Are these adequate and commensurate with the competencies of the volunteers?

Is the volunteer follow-up effort satisfactory? Could it prevent attrition?

Are the volunteers equipped to deal with the materials provided to students in the school's own program? Are they frustrated by providing help to the students in ways the student can't match to their own school experiences?

Does the local RTR program have access to adequate staff to service its tutor training courses? What are its links with local colleges, reading specialists and the like?

Do the volunteer programs operate as significant social institutions for volunteers? Once placed in the schools, do volunteers feel isolated from the program?

What is the role of the volunteer tutor in the life of the student? How does the student feel about the tutor vis-a-vis the teacher? What is the strength of the tutor-student relationship and how far does it extend beyond the tutoring situation into the student's life outside the school?

Perspective 4: Program Support

As a final perspective on the problem of evaluating literacy programs, we will consider the general issue of program support. The same individuals and institutions are involved, but this perspective might conceptualize the relations between them as a team whose overall function is to provide a back-up network to the teacher and the volunteer at the "coalfaces" of the school-based and the volunteer tutoring programs. Among the service functions might be included:

initial, in-service and follow-up training

program development

program evaluation

recruitment and placement

resource management

provision of facilities and materials

publicity and dissemination of information

home and community back-up for the program

The sorts of issues this perspective suggests might include:

Is the school system providing sufficient support for the volunteer program in terms of training, materials and facilities?

Is the teacher-parent relationship providing a vehicle for home cooperation with the reading program?

Are materials being distributed most effectively within the school? Where are there insufficient resources and where are the places they are most needed?

Is the per-student allowance adequate for purchase of materials? How are school funds being spent and to what effect?

Are teachers and volunteers being obliged to spend more time developing support materials than is necessary? Could alterations to the pattern of acquisition of materials in the school or district be made to take account of teachers' preferences?

Is community support for the reading program being tapped? By what mechanisms does the school inform its constituency of its progress in responding to national RTR concern? Is there a need for greater allocation of resources in this area? What is the cost of diverting resources from other services to community involvement?

How much are volunteers spending on tutoring students? Are they buying readers, extra books or magazines to use with their students? What are their travel expenses? Is the school, the district or the RTR program able to relieve mild financial pressures which may cause friction for volunteers?

Are administrators at the district and school levels managing the local literacy program effectively? What feedback mechanisms exist to help them become aware of special problems in reading?

These four perspectives on literacy education have been introduced solely to illustrate the complexity of the evaluation problem. Even a district research and evaluation unit cannot cope with all the questions that might be raised about a literacy program. But, though the scope of the literacy program is vast, the administrator need not recoil in horror or withdraw hopelessly from the task. To the extent that it is possible to use everyone involved in the literacy program as part of an information network, it is possible to create a self-critical, self-monitoring, self-evaluative system. This can be achieved if participants in the system are willing to be accountable for their actions. This entails accountability both from the bottom up and the top down in the educational system: accountability is not a one-way street. From the administrator's point of view, the information flow will be "upwards" in the system towards the decision-maker responsible for the whole system; but this flow of information will be improved if other participants in the system can see that their perspectives influence the decision-making process, and are aware of the constraints on the decision-maker. To meet participants' needs, there must be a counterflow of information "downwards" in the system.

Accountability applies to all participants in the system; it entails the responsibility of all parts of the system to the whole (not just to the head). Although the structure of the literacy program will be generally hierarchical and information cannot flow from any particular part to every other part, it is nevertheless possible to increase the responsiveness to evaluative information throughout the system: accountability means *being responsible for making actions open to view; keeping records and disclosing the activities and consequences of the program.*

Keeping records is one aspect of evaluation which must be emphasized; the other is *making actions open to view.* It is necessary to identify those in the system to take particular evaluation responsibilities and to recognize the essentially *practical* nature of evaluation.

III. PLANNING EVALUATION IN THE LITERACY PROGRAM

If evaluation is to be a manageable task for participants in the literacy program, it is necessary to keep it within the bounds of practicality for those involved. Though large-scale, external evaluation activities may be of immense

benefit to the program, they will often address issues of concern only to people outside the system; use forms of data-gathering beyond the technical reach of those whose primary responsibilities are not to the evaluation aspects and provide reports in language not readily understandable to the practitioner or participant. Though this type of evaluation may contribute substantially to changing the program, it may fail to do justice to the program as it is known by the people deeply involved in it.

If evaluation is to generate the motive power for change from within the system, it must begin with *descriptions* of the system which are recognizable to participants; must reflect the values, commitments and aspirations of the participants, and must represent their *judgments* about where the program succeeds or falls short, what should be retained and what modified. The complexity of the program must be respected, and glib summative judgments (which collapse the program into a simple "yes" or "no," "more" or "less," "good" or "bad") should be avoided. Certainly, the summative judgments must be made-they are the hard choices for the administrator. But the purpose of evaluation is not to offer a final judgment but to provide information so that informal choices can be made by the decision-makers.

Each participant within the program can provide a substrata of evaluative evidence on which particular evaluation activities can be based by maintaining an *evaluation file*, to include descriptions of program activities (updated from time to time) and recollected judgments about these activities made by themselves, other participants and/or visitors. While the collection of evidence may be biased by the interests of the person who keeps it, and may seem arbitrary and uneven, it will provide the evidence which can later be organized and focused around specific issues.[2] Creating an evaluation file is the foundation for specific evaluation efforts: the continuous and cumulative basis from which responses to particular evaluation concerns can be made.

The logic of evaluation, as defined by the eight questions posed in the introduction to this paper, is not a mysterious or unfamiliar one; it is merely systematized common sense. The eight questions simply provide a practical framework for planning specific evaluation efforts as they are needed. We will now return to these questions and examine them individually in the context of the literacy program.[3]

1. *Why evaluate?*

Evaluation of literacy programs is normally conducted in response to concerns expressed by people within the program or from outside agencies, and may respond to a current concern or to a mandated responsibility. Evaluation may focus on past activities or outcomes, what is currently being done, and/or what might be done in the future. Formal evaluation responsibilities can represent a small, but significant, component or a program participant's major responsibilities.

While specific evaluation purposes may vary, the general aim of evaluation is to provide information for the guidance of decision-making about specific programs. In the course of an evaluation, an evaluator may help clarify program issues, decide on what data to gather, and determine how to report information. A final conclusion about the worth of the program may be presented by the evaluator, but ultimately it is for the decision-maker to decide on what course of action to adopt with respect to the program. So the evaluator may leave the final

judgment to the person or group for whom the evaluation is intended, presenting only descriptions of the program and the judgments of relevant people about it. The evaluator should, in these descriptions, attempt to capture as many facets of the program as possible so that those receiving the evaluation reports can understand the program in its complexity. To oversimplify the issues or underestimate their complexity may mislead the decision-makers, not facilitate their task.

Though evaluation may sometimes involve sophisticated techniques used by the social scientist, the evaluator's aim will differ from that of the social scientist who seeks knowledge for "knowledge's sake." The evaluator is primarily concerned with knowledge for action, less concerned with making generalizations than with making relevant, fair and accurate statements about the specific setting. Evaluation activity is usually guided by the concerns of audiences who have an interest in the program itself, rather than by the concerns of the evaluator. Evaluation may thus serve the purposes of program planning, program development or program justification. Evaluation activities may also involve accumulating documentation about the history and impact of the program. Some examples of evaluation purposes in the context of the literacy program are:

Evaluating for program planning:

to assess the need for special programs in reading

to decide on appropriate instructional materials

to assess the possibilities for extending the literacy program into math, science and social studies

to ascertain the possibilities for cooperative or volunteer programs

to identify needs for in-service programs

Evaluating for program improvement:

to assess staff retention and wastage in the volunteer program

to improve volunteer placement methods

to identify resource usage and rationalize resource allocation

to examine patterns of recruitment of volunteers

to aid development of special materials for students with special categories of disabilities

to identify administration weaknesses

to assess progress toward program goals

Evaluating for program justification:

to justify expenditures for materials

to justify instructional strategies

to justify program goals

to compare program goals against set standards

General program documentation:

to record student progress

to document student-teacher and student-tutor interaction

to describe the teaching atmosphere

to list current problems

to record major program accomplishments

to document liaison between the volunteer program and the school program

2. *Who is the evaluation for?*

A range of possible audiences exists for any evaluation effort. For each evaluation there will be a primary audience (participants whose concerns are to be directly addressed) and other secondary audiences (interested "audiences") who might also want to see the report.

In determining who the evaluation is to serve, the evaluator must consider the legitimacy and the urgency of the claims of various groups who are potential audiences. Because of the costs involved, evaluation cannot serve every conceivable audience; therefore, the evaluator will have to assign priorities among potential audiences. (The cost of failing to serve some audiences should also be taken into account.)

Different audiences have different concerns, so an evaluation tailored to the concerns of one group may not meet the needs or serve the interests of another. To insure that the evaluation can meet the needs of its primary audiences, the evaluator must be clear about the concerns and preferences of each group that might be served. In the general evaluation file, it is relevant to accumulate material about the needs, concerns and interests of major potential audiences, as well as information about their criteria of program success, their expectations of the program, and the forms of reporting they find most useful and accessible.

Relevant audiences include:

federal and state administrators

school district central office staff

school administrators

local RTR program directors

teachers

RTR volunteer tutors

students and their families

the community at large (including, for example, local employers)

local colleges, reading experts, literacy educators

3. *What questions should the evaluation address?*

Sometimes the evaluator will decide what questions the evaluation is to address; but most often these questions will be decided with reference to the concerns of the audiences of the evaluation and the perspectives of the participants. As indicated earlier, there are three overlapping phases in defining the issues to be addressed in the evaluation: gathering the original issues from the primary audience, expanding the scope of the evaluation by bringing to bear other relevant concerns and perspectives, and "progressive focusing" which focuses the evaluation on a final, more refined set of issues and creates a "language of negotiation" between those with different responsibilities for and perspectives on the program.

One of the most damning things that can be said of an evaluation is that it answers questions that no one is asking; this failure can be avoided if the evaluation takes as its point of departure the issues identified by the audiences of the report and participants in the program. It is then possible for the evaluation to be "authentic" insofar as it draws upon the interests, concerns, language and experience of those the evaluation serves and whose work it represents.

Possible sources of issues concerned with a literacy program include:

Questions about program costs:

Can the expense of new materials be justified?

What is the approximate cost of the literacy program per student?

How much does the volunteer program cost volunteers?

What is the cost of literacy education as a proportion of time spent in school?

Questions about outcomes:

What improvement in reading skills takes place in students over grades?

What changes can be noted in student attitudes to reading in the volunteer program?

Do teachers report increased competence, confidence or interest after the in-service program?

What categories of students are most served by the volunteer tutoring program? Are their special needs being met?

Questions about processes:

How does the school's literacy program work in reality? What variation is there among teachers in the teaching of reading?

Under what conditions are different reading schemes chosen and how are they implemented?

What records are kept by teachers of student progress?

How do the recruitment and placement functions of the volunteer program work?

Under what conditions will teachers attend special in-service programs on reading?

What is the school's diagnostic program like in practice? Are special programs available to meet the range of special needs?

How is technical assistance provided to the school by the central office for diagnostic testing and analysis of test results?

What are the informal networks that provide the "glue" for liaison between the central office staff, the school and the volunteer program in the area of reading?

Does the impermanence of the volunteer-student relationship affect the commitment of either or both to the tutoring program?

What is it like to be in the second-grade reading class?

Discrepancies between the intended and the actual:

Are learner needs being met?

Are teacher and tutor expectations realistic?

Can the program deliver on its promises?

Are the resources provided sufficient to make attainment of program goals possible?

Are the roles of tutors included in the program's job description?

Are tutors meeting the standards of competence and confidentiality outlined?

Are teachers spending sufficient time on reading? Do teachers hear children reading as often and for as long as they claim?

Are teachers' expectations of the administration being met (and vice-versa)?

Does the reality of the school's program measure up to the principal's claims?

Are special programs justified in terms of school use?

4. *What resources are available for the evaluation?*

Some evaluation efforts will be specifically funded and will have an explicit budget. More often, however, the evaluation will be an informal "shoestring" affair, with no budget or only limited funding.

Given limited resources of time, money, materials and support, it becomes especially necessary to focus the evaluation on a small number of issues of real importance rather than questions of purely rhetorical interest. Sophisticated evaluation designs involving test development or modification and the implementation of a testing program and appropriate analysis of results are often extremely expensive and may yield conclusions which refer to only one dimension of the program. Though educational rhetoric appears to justify everything in terms of student performance gains, even student gains must be set against the real sources of influence in decision-making. In reality, the crucial influences are often political, not educational. The evaluator should avoid the naivete which gives all the attention of the evaluation to student learning, but also avoid the cynicism which gives all its attention to political influence.

It is perfectly possible to carry out an inexpensive evaluation focusing on significant issues in the literacy program, especially if participants give a little time regularly to evaluation efforts. Interviews may be just as successful as more "objective" methods are in bringing relevant issues into the open; and the substance of the replies can be checked for fairness, relevance and accuracy by triangulation with other interviewees' accounts as well as through checking back with interviewees after the original interview.

A dollar cost for evaluation can be estimated in terms of time, supplies and expertise required; but the evaluator should also consider the *hidden* costs of acquiring information, measured in terms of time lost by evaluating trade-offs (alternative uses of funds), and human costs, such as invasion of privacy, the possible creation of negative attitudes or conflict within the program, and increased pressure on program personnel.

The value of an evaluation can be assessed by setting these costs against the significance of the issues and the likely impact of the findings. Continuous, small-scale evaluation may represent a significant investment over the long run, but can be an almost invisible effort in terms of the distraction of program participants from their major responsibilities. Furthermore, by preparing the ground work, this type of evaluation may contribute to change within the program and eliminate the necessity for evaluation coming from outside the program.

Resource considerations for evaluation include:

Existing evaluation information sources:

participants' evaluation files

student records (note restrictions on access)

current test results

public documents

prior reports, accumulated documents, minutes of meetings and the like

census data

research findings

Resource needs:

time and money to collect information, analyze and report

technical assistance

Potential costs of evaluating:

hidden costs (invasions of privacy, controversy, pressure, disruption of the program, loss of control over immediate events as reports go to powerful, though distant, audiences, etc.)

5. *What evidence should be collected?*

Evidence is any information which may contribute to the consideration of a particular issue being examined in an evaluation. Once the issues have been selected, the search for evidence may begin; as evidence is collected, the issues will be refined and the search for further evidence will be narrowed. Evidence may take many forms: descriptions of program activities, content, goals and outcomes; descriptions of the setting and social milieu of the program; portrayals of relevant program participants; judgments of the value of the program; speculations about cause and effect in the program. For different issues and audiences, different kinds of evidence will be appropriate.

The quality of evidence may be generally assessed in terms of its fairness, relevance and accuracy (as judged by participants). Other checks include checks on the relevance of evidence to issues and audiences (consistency); balance and scope; the validity of measures (the extent to which they measure what they are intended to measure); reliability (the extent to which measures are accurate and consistent; or the extent to which accounts are triangulated, i.e., they match with other participants' accounts and the same participant's accounts at a later date); the degree to which side effects and other anticipated and unanticipated outcomes have been identified; and the degree to which the evaluator is credible.

Some relevant types of evidence include:

Descriptive evidence:

descriptions of program participants

goals, objectives or aims descriptions

process or procedure description

descriptions of outcomes or impact

context, setting or milieu descriptions

descriptions of cost

Judgmental evidence:

judgments of the value of program components, successes or failures

statements of standards gathered from participants, consultants, commissions, public documents, legal standards

6. *How is the evidence to be collected?*

After deciding on the evidence to be collected, the evaluator must decide how much evidence to collect and from what data sources to collect it. Data sources are people or things that provide evidence about the program (e.g. program participants and personnel, existing documents, related evaluation studies, etc.). The proportion of data sources to be tapped should also be considered (sampling). Proper consideration must be given to the ethics of data-gathering (privacy, risk, etc.). Considerations of how the data will be treated, analyzed and interpreted will also arise.

Various data-gathering strategies exist. Some are formal, some informal. Formal techniques include measuring instruments and observation schedules; informal techniques include unstructured interviews and impressionistic accounts. The obtrusiveness of the particular means of data-gathering should also be considered.

Sometimes instruments or data-gathering procedures suitable to the situation will already exist; at other times unique instruments or procedures must be developed.

Tactical concerns about data-gathering also exist: concerns about the timing of information collection, about the explanations given to informants regarding the purposes of the evaluation and the use of the data, and about the appropriate means of coding, storing and securing data. Unless these questions are considered in advance, the evaluator may prejudice the program or particular participants, or may find that the data are unusable.

Several relevant techniques for collecting data are:

questionnaires and attitude scales

interviews (or informal conversations)

observation schedules and interaction analyses

active participation and participant observer techniques

historical, biographical and anecdotal techniques

standardized tests

rating scales and checklists

investigative journalism

7. *How is the evidence to be analyzed?*

It is in the analysis and interpretation of data that the meaning of the evidence and its relevance to future action becomes clear. It is crucial that the evaluator be intensely self-critical in the process of analysis because it is at this point that his or her own preferred values and ways of thinking may intrude into the evaluation. Where possible, evaluation audiences and program participants should be given the opportunity to check the analysis and interpretation to see how it matches with their perspectives in terms of fairness, relevance and accuracy. The evaluator should not be co-opted by the views of these audiences but neither should the evaluation report be far at odds with their views without some explanation.

The choice of an analytic technique will depend upon the nature of the information to be analyzed, the purpose of the analysis, and the resources available. Quantitative statistical procedures may be appropriate in some cases; in others, qualitative techniques (e.g. content analysis, expert opinion, literacy criticism, historical analysis) may be appropriate. Another starting point for analysis is comparison.

Comparative analysis:

program change over time

consequence of intended and observed program inputs, transactions and outcomes

comparisons of current program components (consistency)

inter-program comparisons

aims-achievement discrepancies, and discrepancies between required standards and performance

Quantitative analysis (e.g. regression analysis, correlation)

Qualitative analysis (e.g. content analysis, literary criticism, historical methods)

8. *How can the evaluation findings be reported?*

Different experiences and backgrounds will influence the way people receive and use evaluation reports. The evaluator should be aware of the possible ways his or her reports will be received by the audiences of the report. Some persons will find standard scores, technical and statistical information quite comprehensible; others will be misled by such information or perhaps unable to understand it. Because the evaluation may stand or fall by its report, the evaluation report must be comprehensible and accessible to the audiences involved.

The report should not only be presented in a form and style appropriate to its audiences, but should also establish a language or negotiation between the different interest groups associated with the program. Only if they can understand

the report and see the program differently through it, will the evaluation effort be justified.

An evaluator may be asked to include specific implications from the evaluation findings in the report. If this is the case, then the audience is entitled to know the biases and the preferences of the evaluator. But the evaluator may prefer to encourage decision-makers to draw their own conclusions from the findings. Whether recommendations are or are not to be given should be decided in advance so that expectations are clear.

Some types of reporting are:

written or oral

progress or final

general or specific

technical or nontechnical

descriptive or judgmental

recommendatory or non-recommendatory

Methods of reporting include:

case study

portrayal

graphs and charts

test scores

scenarios

question-answer

product displays

multimedia presentations

simulation

documentary film

literary criticism

journalistic

executive summaries

advocate or adversarial

These eight questions provide a framework for planning evaluation. No all-purpose evaluation design can be created which will identify all the information

needed for every evaluation of a reading program. Each evaluation study must be designed to suit the purposes, issues, audiences and resources of the particular situation at hand. The evaluation must respect the complexity and wholeness of the program it sets out to study, but it cannot embrace every aspect of the program. It achieves most by throwing light on a few questions and setting the wholeness of the program against the particular insights those questions suggest.

It is hoped that the eight questions considered here may provide a starting place for the would-be evaluator of the reading program and furnish the administrator with a perspective from which to evaluate proposed evaluation designs. Though the point has been made and repeated before, it is worth stating again: evaluation is a practical activity concerned with knowledge for action. As such, the content and the methods of the evaluation must seem relevant to those the evaluation is to address. An evaluation should not be so technically sophisticated that it is incomprehensible to its primary audience, it should serve program participants and decision-makers, not researchers whose responsibilities and interests are with research communities distant from the program itself.

IV. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE ADMINISTRATOR

As this paper has attempted to show, evaluation may provide a mechanism by which the people involved in a literacy program may become self-aware, self-monitoring and self-critical. Evaluation can provide the program, as a system, with the means for its own evolution. In this section, we will briefly consider three broad systematic concerns which are of special interest to the program administrator who must be concerned with the ability of the program to develop and survive within its environment: program development, community attitudes and school-community relations.

Program Development

Program development requires a future orientation and depends upon imaginative understanding of how the program might be, and how it might be different. Such an understanding comes from awareness of options currently available to the system as well as from predictions of possible futures of the program.

At the level of instructional programs, development might begin from awareness of currently available curriculum approaches in reading: the basal reading approach, language-experience, individualized reading, programmed instruction, words in color and i.t.a. (the initial teaching alphabet). Teachers in the program may be introduced to phonetic and linguistic approaches for teaching reading and determine the "mix" of methods with which they and their students feel most comfortable. Each approach has its own internal logic and imposes its own demands on classroom organization and management structures. To become aware of the possibilities of each approach, or to arrive at a satisfactory mix of methods, the teachers and administrators involved must arrive at an "experiential" understanding of how each one actually works. If the program as a whole can support a diversity of approaches, the conditions for evolution from within may be created. This requires that the program participants be self-aware and capable of learning from experience. Continuous evaluation which emphasizes description may allow experiences of different approaches to be shared and perspectives broadened.

At the level of innovation strategy, program development must begin from an understanding of current program operation (perhaps through evaluation) and point to areas in which the system is amenable to change. This entails identifying growth

points, areas of conflict, discrepancies between aspirations and current achievement, and areas of experienced need.

In considering innovation strategy, the following guidelines may be useful:

1. *Build on existing resources:* identify people with commitment to innovation and utilize their strengths; attempt to find ways of matching the efforts of innovators with administrative support; encourage local redistributions of resources which demonstrate commitment. Through these means, the survival chances of the innovation are enhanced--the local region of the system is demonstrating its accommodations to the innovation.

2. *Give episodic rather than "lump" support:* although the innovator must be in a position to count on continuing support, it is strategically preferable that support be given in smaller units over a longer period. This ensures continuous assessment by the innovators of their claims for support and provides more opportunities for interaction between the innovator and the administrator. These contacts should be fruitful to both and encourage awareness on both sides of the innovation as part of the total system.

3. *Don't demand proof before development:* aspirations are the stuff research and development are made of--the innovator is usually placed in the position where he or she must promise success before the innovation has been tried. If the "funding talk" is taken too seriously, then when the innovation runs into problems (and all do) there will be a temptation to regard the innovation as failing and to threaten it with closure. By adopting a positive and supportive attitude to innovation, however, and a realistic perspective on the likelihood of success, it is possible for both innovator and administrator to avoid the absurd situation in which modifications and adaptations of the innovation to local problems and interests are treated as failure to live by the letter of the proposal. All innovations demand change of the system; likewise, all systems demand modifications of the innovation.

4. *Don't expect the influx of new resources to create the conditions of survival of the innovation:* if the innovation depends on major resource investments, it may create a state of dependency of the innovation on unusual or extraordinary administrative support. To survive, the innovation must be capable of supporting itself when the "honeymoon" period is over and resource allocation returns to normal levels. If expectations are created of extraordinary support, then the innovation may collapse just at the point where it could become orthodoxy.

5. *Develop management and evaluation structures which can provide stability in the face of program change:* the innovator and the administrator must be able to count on networks of support which can tide the program over the period of uncertainty the innovation creates. Like the White House hotline, communication channels between innovator and administrator provide the possibility of consultancy at times of crisis. Continuous evaluation provides the means of self-awareness which allows the system as a whole to adjust to localized differentiation. If the innovation is successful, the possibility of its diffusion through the system will be enhanced if the system as a whole is prepared. Every innovation is a gamble for the system as well as for the innovators: the system must be prepared to deal with the consequences of its success or failure.

6. *Allow for gradual rather than abrupt diffusion of the innovative idea:* putting pressure on the innovators to declare the success of the program too dramatically or too soon may endanger the innovation itself or the possibility of dissemination. If the innovation is not ready for public display it may be rejected by possible implementers as problem-ridden; if too much is made of its novelty, it will appear unassimilable to potential users. The ground must be prepared, and allowances must always be made for adaptation in each new implementation site.

7. *Recognize the political nature of innovation:* as the foregoing comments suggest, innovation depends as much on influence networks as upon the quality of the innovation itself. A British educational evaluator has remarked, "The citadel of established practice will seldom fall to the polite knock of a good idea." Innovator-administrator communication is a prime political link, but other links must also be forged. The administrator can provide opportunities for other significant links to be made by the innovator (through he or she must avoid sheer patronage, nepotism and other abuses of discretionary power), and can encourage the innovator to contact other interested and significant figures inside and outside the system. Such informal networks are not invidious--they are the medium in which innovation can develop its own support systems. Helping innovators to develop those support systems is not an abuse of power by the administrator, it is a way of making people throughout the whole system more self-aware and more aware of the conditions in which they survive. As research on innovation shows, the innovation process depends upon "the primacy of personal contact."[4]

Community Attitudes

Reading is rapidly becoming an area of prime concern among educators, and the improvement of reading programs is becoming a prime concern for administrators. Members of the community at large are becoming aware of these concerns, but have little clear idea of how national efforts in the area are being realized.

Administrators who have responsibility for representing the program to those who provide the means for its support are conscious of the need to better understand community attitudes. Apart from routine social contacts, normal formal and informal advisory and consultative networks and the statutory community involvement via Boards of Education, the administrator may feel the need for special efforts to assess community attitudes to reading.

The most obvious means for achieving such improved understanding is the *needs assessment,* in which a sample of community members is interviewed or polled (e.g. via mail questionnaire). But needs assessment is often an expensive operation, especially if the range of attitudes to be explored is broad. Other less formal methods may be adequate.

Regular teacher-parent interviews provide a massive source of data on community attitudes, as do PTA meetings and the contacts made through other school functions. Still other resources (existing records, evaluation reports, etc.) might be found in the local library. Local radio and newspaper media may provide information about community concerns. Public response to changes in school policy also allow the administrator to infer community attitudes.

But the area of literacy education is so vast and is such a central part of the community's expectations of the school that, paradoxically, it may be difficult to assess community attitudes with sufficient sensitivity. It they are given only restricted opportunities to express their attitudes, community members are likely to express only global, undifferentiated concerns ("What about standards?" "What about the three R's?"). The more intimate contacts of the administrator with the community are likely to reveal more differentiated responses. By allowing these networks to evolve into sensitizing systems, the administrator may educate the community about the literacy program and invite more particularized and concrete suggestions. We will consider one set of such networks in the next subsection.

School-community Cooperation

The statutory links of school to community are generally so formalized as to make them rather insensitive to two-way influence about the development of reading skill. Though these mechanisms allow rhetorical claims for improvement to be handled and policy to be modified at the highest levels, they may be poor mechanisms for encouraging closer cooperation. As already indicated, less formal networks like the PTA may be more powerful in encouraging real interaction.

One prime link to be made in school-community cooperation in the development of reading skill is the home-school link. The school can make its reading program more transparent to parents, and by doing so, can encourage parents to participate in their children's reading development. Teacher-parent conferences are an obvious link to be nourished, and less formal teacher-parent contacts can also provide opportunities for giving feedback to parents about children's needs and progress. An ability to forge strong links with parents has always been a hallmark of the good teacher, providing a genuine means of parent participation in education.

The expansion of RTR volunteer programs also creates opportunities for school-community cooperation. The volunteers are often contacted by program staff members through existing charitable and volunteer organizations, and in this way, links from the school to the community are created. But these often tend to be links to individuals already concerned about community problems. (There is even the possibility that the capacity of these committed individuals and organizations might be overloaded.) The problem for the school is to make contact with outside community people who have legitimate interests in the reading program and to create opportunities to involve them in the program. Contacts with interested parents may develop into more sustained links as parents become part-time teachers' aides; contacts with retired teachers may create pools of willing helpers with time, expertise and concern for children; contacts with high schools may yield groups of older students willing to help out with youngsters with poor motivation; contacts with local colleges may create the possibility of volunteer consultation and technical expertise in the area of reading development and research; contacts with local businessmen may yield donations towards a school Reading Center (acknowledged by a plaque in the Center or on materials); contacts with local politicians may create local lobbies to support the school's reading program and development of the local library; contacts with social work agencies may create possibilities for cooperative programs or cooperative efforts in dealing with children with special difficulties or home problems.

To capitalize on these links, systematic ways must be found to bring reading problems to the notice of the community: to publicize reading problems and to respond to or acknowledge expressions of interest. A newsletter can be prepared

and distributed to inform the community about the program, and back-up from a school committee can make possible a more personal, face-to-face response to persons who indicate their interest. Attempts at school-community cooperation, though well-intentioned, often amount to no more than setting snares for expressions of interest and waiting for *community* action: they may fail because they are not *genuine* interactions. To engage the community in a dialogue with the school about reading demands a willingness not only to speak, but to listen: not only to express concern, but to respond. Persons on the school staff are already busy with full-time responsibilities--new responsibilities which require genuine interaction with the community members cannot be accepted lightly. Improving school-community cooperation is hard work.

To engage community people in the school's reading program, it is necessary to invent mechanisms by which:

community members may be actively involved in the life of the school (e.g. as aides)

information about the reading program can be disseminated (e.g. a newsletter sent to anyone expressing interest--a mailing list is built up responsively, and personal responses are made to individual initiatives)

advice may be sought (e.g. from local reading experts, School Board members)

feedback may be given (e.g. the newsletter, postcards to acknowledge expressions of interest, letters reporting the effects of courses of action)

the reading program may be modified in the light of community response when teachers find ideas for change acceptable

Through these mechanisms, a network of interested individuals can be created and cooperation enhanced. These groups, agencies and individuals, are "invisible society" which support the literacy program and may be the audiences for evaluation efforts.

V. CONCLUDING COMMENT

In this paper, we have discussed the problems of literacy education from the special perspective of evaluation. The evaluation perspective, by its very nature, draws us into the complexity of the literacy program as a whole. Because evaluation encourages self-scrutiny throughout the entire system, promoting awareness of the program beyond the school-based or volunteer program, it is necessarily holistic. Yet evaluation is essentially action-oriented, concrete and practical: it begins with crucial issues and audiences of the program and reflects back on it. The eight questions considered in this paper demonstrate how evaluation arises from the program and returns to the program.

As a final comment, it may be worth emphasizing that evaluation is not always benign: ill-judged revelations of program problems, exposure of individual's personal views, and publication of contrary opinions may feed conflict within, and controversy about, the program. Better understanding of the program does not imply consensus about it: conflict over sensitive issues is as much to be expected as consensus about innocuous ones. Evaluation efforts should thus be assumed to be audience-related; reports should be for distribution to named groups or individuals

rather than always for open, unrestricted circulation. Evaluation must be compassionate in the sense that those put at risk by the evaluation must be protected by its procedures (unless there is good reason for exposure); vulnerable participants must live with the consequences of the evaluation.

If participants in literacy programs are to remain confident and optimistic about the promise and the possibilities of the national Right-to-Read effort, they must keep a firm hold on the social and political realities of the program, the existing educational systems into which the Right-to-Read programs are transplanted. Evaluation which promotes systemic self-scrutiny may make this possible.

FOOTNOTES

[1]These questions were developed in the preparation of A. Grotelueschen, et. al.; *An Evaluation Planner* (available from Dr. Grotelueschen, Director, Office for the Study of Continuing Professional Education, 130 Education Building, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois 61801). While the *Planner* is specifically referenced to Adult Basic Education, it is useful in aiding conceptualization of evaluation problems in general.

[2]See Pat Scheyer and Bob Stake's paper on portraying an educational program, "A Self-Evaluation Portfolio", CIRCE, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois 61801; also Arden Grotelueschen and Stephen Kemmis, "The Evaluation of Demonstration Library Projects" available from the senior author at 130 Education Building, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

[3]The treatment of these questions is adapted from *An Evaluation Planner*; see Footnote 1.

[4]See Ernest R. House, *The Politics of Innovation*, Berkeley: McCutchan, 1974.